

# NORTH AND SOUTH

by Elizabeth Gaskell



## THE AUTHOR

Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson (1810-1865) was born in London, the daughter of a Unitarian minister, but she was largely raised by her aunt after her mother died in 1811. Her brother, somewhat like Frederick Hale, joined the navy, but disappeared on a voyage to India and was never heard from again. Her father died in 1829, and in 1832 she married a Unitarian minister in Manchester named William Gaskell. She gave birth to six children, two of whom died in infancy. Her writing career began with the publication of a poem, *Sketches Among the Poor*, written with her husband in 1837. Her first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848), was rejected by critics because of its strong social message, defending industrial workers against their masters. In some senses, *North and South* (1854-55) was a response to this, since the book tries very hard to present both sides in the conflict. She came to know many of the literary lights of the age, including Charles Dickens, in whose magazine some of her works were serialized, William Wordsworth, and Charlotte Bronte, whose biography she published in 1857. Other notable works include *Cranford* (1853), *Ruth* (1853), and *Wives and Daughters* (1866), considered her best novel, but left unfinished at her death.

Gaskell is best known as a social critic, and was influenced not only by lesser-known works of Charlotte Bronte such as *Shirley* and the social criticism of Dickens, but also by the work of Frederick Engels, who was living and writing in Manchester at the same time Gaskell was there. *North and South*, as noted above, tries hard to present both sides of the conflict at the heart of the Industrial Revolution, but does little to propose solutions to the problem. That masters should listen to and care for their workers may seem paternalistic today, but was a significant improvement on the common practice of the middle of the nineteenth century. That workers should beware of the tyranny of unions was an argument frequently heard, but Gaskell was one of the earliest novelists to present the workers' side of the same issue. *North and South* also touches on the question of the Church of England, which had already accepted Unitarians as ministers in the late eighteenth century (thus Hale's resignation from the Church for doubting its creed is somewhat anachronistic). Her view of Christianity is clearly influenced by her own Unitarian experience.

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Margaret Hale - The story's protagonist, she is a girl from a comfortable middle-class family who is forced by circumstances to move to the industrial city of Milton. Her ideas about life change greatly as a result of her experiences there.
- Richard Hale - Margaret's father, he is the vicar of Helstone parish until he resigns from the church, forcing the family's move to Milton. Unable to deal with his grief, he dies soon after the death of his wife.
- Maria Hale - Margaret's mother, she is perpetually aggrieved at the poverty and lack of ambition of her husband, and envies her sister's wealth. She hates Milton from the beginning, and eventually dies there.
- Frederick Hale (now Dickenson) - Margaret's brother, he was a sailor in the British navy who was involved in a mutiny, and therefore is unable to return to England and has changed his name; the family has little contact with him, though he does risk his life to return to see his mother before she dies. He eventually converts to Catholicism and marries a Spanish girl.
- Dixon - The Hales' housekeeper, she is fiercely loyal to her mistress.
- Anna Shaw - Margaret's aunt, with whom she has lived for much of the previous ten years; she is a widow who married a man much older than herself, and envies her sister, who married for love.
- Edith Shaw - Margaret's cousin, she marries Captain Lennox and moves to Corfu, then later back to London after Lennox resigns his commission.
- Captain Sholto Lennox - At one point referred to as Cosmo, he is Edith's new bridegroom, an officer stationed on the island of Corfu in the Mediterranean.
- Henry Lennox - The Captain's brother, a lawyer, he and Margaret are friends. When he proposes to her, she turns him down, though he never stops loving her. He uses his legal skills to research Frederick's case, but is unable to exonerate him.
- Adam Bell - An Oxford don and an old friend of Hale's, he was best man at his wedding and is Margaret's godfather. He is also Thornton's landlord and arranges for Hale to move to Milton and get a tutoring job after he leaves the church. Hale dies while visiting his home in Oxford, and Bell dies a short time thereafter, leaving everything to Margaret.
- John Thornton - The manager of a cotton mill in Milton, he falls in love with Margaret, proposes, but is rejected. He becomes a good friend of Hale, to whom he goes to improve his education, and never loses his love for Margaret. He works hard to earn the respect of his workers and to understand their lives better. An economic downturn almost causes

him to lose the mill, but he is saved when Margaret invests some of the money she inherits from Bell. He never loses his love for Margaret, and at the end the two marry.

- Hannah Thornton - John's mother, she is a stern woman, proud of her son's accomplishments, and has no time for people who put on airs.
- Fanny Thornton - John's sister, she is weak and flighty; she marries a speculator who becomes fabulously wealthy.
- Nicholas Higgins - A poor neighbor of the Hales in Milton, he is an honorable man who goes to work for Thornton and teaches him to understand the working man.
- Bessy Higgins - Higgins' sickly daughter who is befriended by Margaret; she dies of tuberculosis.
- Mary Higgins - Bessy's clumsy and awkward younger sister, she helps the Hales during Mrs. Hale's final illness.
- John Boucher - Higgins' neighbor, he is bitter at the poverty in which he and his family are forced to live. He leads the riot at Thornton's mill during which Margaret is injured despite the kindness Margaret had shown to his family, and later drowns himself after he is unable to find work. Higgins takes in and cares for his orphaned children.
- George Leonards - One of Frederick's shipmates, he is a scoundrel who seeks to betray Frederick for the reward money. He dies after a scuffle with Frederick at a train station.
- Dolores Barbour - Frederick's young Spanish wife.

## **PLOT SUMMARY**

The story begins with Margaret Hale involved in preparations for her cousin Edith Shaw's wedding to Captain Lennox. Though Margaret, now nineteen, has lived with her aunt for the last ten years and only vacationed at the parsonage where her parents live, she is now preparing to live with them on a regular basis. After the wedding, Margaret returns with her father to Helstone, where she loves the countryside with all its beauties, but finds the house stifling because of the discontented attitude of her mother.

One day Henry Lennox pays a visit to the vicarage. He spends time sketching with Margaret and stays for dinner. After dinner, he and Margaret take a walk in the garden and he proposes marriage. She is taken aback, having no desire for anything more than friendship with him, and refuses him. That evening, her father pulls Margaret aside and tells her the startling news that he is resigning his parish because he can no longer subscribe to the creed of the Church of England [Gaskell herself was a Unitarian]. He is to preach his farewell sermon the following Sunday, and the family must then move to Milton-Northern [Manchester], where he is to become a tutor. He leaves Margaret with the unpleasant task of breaking the news to her mother, which she does the following day while her father is away from the house. Mrs. Hale soon becomes ill,

leaving all the arrangements for the move to Margaret. As the time approaches to leave Helstone, Margaret decides that her mother must stay at Heston, about thirty miles from Milton, until she and her father are able to find a suitable house. On the day the family leaves Helstone, each grieves in his or her own way. They then travel to London, where they spend the night, then go on to Heston, where Mrs. Hale is to stay until a house in Milton is found.

The next day Margaret and her father go to Milton, where Margaret is taken aback by the smoky, dirty, and crowded nature of the place. They can only afford to rent a small house in the city, and they finally find one in the suburb of Crampton that should be marginally satisfactory under Margaret's creative management. They also meet John Thornton, the wealthy manager of a cotton mill and the man through whom Mr. Hale is to establish his tutoring work. He is impressed with Margaret's beauty, but thinks her haughty, and she dismisses him because he obviously is not a gentleman. Soon Mrs. Hale moves in, and between her complaining spirit, the thick fog and smoke of Milton, and Edith's letters about all the fun she is having with her new husband at their villa in Corfu, Margaret very much misses the freedom and beauty of Helstone. Mr. Hale manages to pick up a few students, though the desire for learning among the citizens takes a distant second place to their desire for their children to get ahead in trade. Hale and Thornton, meanwhile, become good friends, often talking far beyond the tutoring sessions that Thornton is not too proud to attend. Margaret, in her walks through the city trying to find a suitable servant for the household, has trouble adjusting to the freedom with which men and women alike make comments to perfect strangers, but gradually gets used to the strange ways of these factory workers. Over time, she begins to befriend a middle-aged neighbor named Nicholas Higgins and his daughter Bessy, and offers to come visit in their home.

The next day, Mr. Hale comes home and announces to his family that Thornton is coming that evening for tea. Mrs. Hale is flustered because she has insufficient help to make the place presentable and bemoans the fact that gentlefolk like themselves would have to stoop to inviting in someone who is in trade. Meanwhile, in the Thornton household, John's mother, a stern and severe old lady, is displeased that her son should waste his time with a useless gentleman, and fears that Margaret is angling for her wealthy son. When John tells her that Margaret had acted haughtily to him, and was surely not trying to "catch" him, his mother is even more offended that some young girl should put on airs toward her noble and generous son. When John arrives at the Hale home, he immediately notices the difference between their house, shabby though it may be by their standards, and his own. The tea itself goes fine as long as the two men are in conversation, but when Margaret begins to talk, conflict arises immediately, with her praising the life of the country and Thornton speaking of the value of city life. He goes so far as to speak of his own past, how he worked hard to bring himself and his family up from poverty, and argues that any ambitious man may do the same. He and Margaret continue to clash, and he leaves the dinner party thinking that he has never met such a proud and disagreeable girl, her beauty notwithstanding. After Thornton leaves, Mr. Hale tells Margaret more about him. His father had been a speculator and gambler who committed suicide after accumulating huge debts. John, his mother, and his little sister Fanny had then left Milton and lived on next to nothing while he worked as a boy in a shop to make up the money to pay his father's debts. Margaret admires the character such a life demonstrates, but still dislikes John personally.

She is also troubled by her mother's accelerating physical decline. Determined to find a suitable servant to help out around the house, she spends all her time traveling around the city searching, but finds no one appropriate. One day while she is out and about, she runs into Bessy

Higgins. She suddenly remembers that she had completely forgotten her promised visit in the chaos of preparing for Thornton's coming to tea. Bessy tells her of her father's bitter response, thinking that Margaret was just like all the rest of the gentlefolk, but Margaret goes immediately to their poor abode. Bessy is seriously ill with consumption (tuberculosis) and does not expect to live out the year. Margaret cares for her gently, and Nicholas, watching her tender affection, tells her that he wished he believed in God so that he could ask Him to bless her for her kindness.

The next day, Mrs. Thornton and Fanny pay a call on Mrs. Hale and Margaret. The Thorntons consider this an act of condescension, since the Hales are poor and engage in no useful work. When Mrs. Thornton begins to speak of the factories of Milton, Margaret expresses no interest, though Fanny is obviously quite interested in London, which she has never visited. After the Thorntons leave, Margaret rushes off to see Bessy and finds her considerably worse. The girl, who is her own age, tells her that her health has been ruined from the cotton fluff getting into her lungs in the mill. Margaret promises to visit again, but doesn't know when she will be able to do so.

When she gets home, she finds her mother worse as well, and her father in a serious state of denial. One night her mother feels like talking, and tells Margaret the story of her older brother Frederick. He had been an officer on a ship captained by an old enemy of his, who had habitually abused the crew and treated them cruelly. When his cruelty led to the death of one of the men, Frederick and many others mutinied, putting the captain and some other officers overboard in a small boat. The crew members who were later captured were hanged, and Frederick, knowing it meant death to return to England, had changed his name and lived abroad for the last seven years, first in South America and now in Spain.

The next day, Mr. Hale and Margaret decide to return Mrs. Thornton's visit, since Mrs. Hale is too sick to do so. When they arrive at the Thornton residence, they are surprised to find that it is in the same enclosure as the factory. Though the inside is well-kept, the atmosphere is smelly and dirty. Mrs. Thornton again speaks highly of Milton and the virtues of the men of business like her son who bring the city prosperity. She also tells them that a strike is likely to occur, and explains to Margaret that a strike is nothing more than an attempt by workers to make themselves masters of their masters. John arrives and joins the conversation, arguing that his workers are well-treated and that he runs his business with great integrity. Margaret tells him that not all his workers would agree, and he soon perceives that the source of this discontent must be Higgins. John argues that his workers, because of their ignorance, must be treated like children on the job, but because they are human beings with innate dignity, he has no right to interfere in their lives outside the factory; Margaret responds that, if they were treated with greater dignity inside the factory they might not have to strike, while he does bear responsibility for caring for them outside of the work environment.

Dr. Donaldson comes to see Mrs. Hale after Thornton had contacted him. He examines her and discovers that she has an incurable illness and will soon die. Despite her specific request not to tell her family (only Dixon knows), Margaret forces the information out of the doctor. She determines to spend as much time with her mother as she can, nursing her along with Dixon, but to keep the bad news from her father as long as possible. Mrs. Hale longs for nothing more than to see Frederick again, but knows it is impossible. Margaret, needing to get out of the house, goes to see Bessy Higgins. There she hears about the impending strike from Higgins' perspective, and discovers that the cause of the strike is that the workers are being forced to take a cut in pay, and that Thornton is among the masters who are doing this. Bessy, who deplures strikes as worse than

useless, is comforted that this will be the last one she sees. Margaret then confides in her about her mother's illness and the tragedy of her brother Frederick's situation. When she got home, Margaret found an invitation from Mrs. Thornton to a dinner party; her mother, of course, could not go, but she and her father decide to go anyway. Her father is still in denial about his wife's condition, though he senses that all is not well. Mrs. Thornton, meanwhile, can't decide how she feels about Margaret, and neither can her son. John knows from the doctor the extent of Mrs. Hale's illness and asks his mother and sister to be kind to Margaret in her trouble, but they still think her an impossible snob. Meanwhile, he must prepare for the coming strike - it has already begun in some of the factories - and has no intention of giving in to the workers' demands; he will even bring laborers over from Ireland if the strike is not settled within a fortnight.

The next time Margaret visits Bessy, she finds that Higgins' factory is on strike already and that the masters are showing no signs of giving in. She also tells Bessy about the coming dinner party at the Thorntons' home, and Bessy is amazed that such a poor family should be invited to dine with ones so rich. A neighbor, Boucher, who is also on strike, comes over and complains about his sickly wife and starving children, and Higgins assures him that the masters will give in soon, but promises to give him what money he can to tide him over until then; Margaret also gives him what little money she has in her purse. When she gets home and tells her mother about what she saw and heard, Mrs. Hale insists on putting together a basket of food for the Bouchers despite the fact that Thornton argues that such actions only prolong the strike and therefore are not helpful at all, and Mr. Hale visits them the next day.

On the night of the Thornton dinner party, Margaret dresses in her finest. Though the Thorntons themselves are abstemious in their habits, they go out of their way to make the food and the furnishings fine and plentiful for their party. All Margaret can think of, however, is the starving workers who have now struck Thornton's mill as well. When John sees Margaret in her lovely dress, he is transfixed by her beauty; Margaret also notices the dignity with which he hosts the dinner and the respect he obviously has from his fellow mill owners. They say little about the strike, since all assume the masters will win in time. Later, Thornton claims no fears of violence, since he is well-known for protecting his replacement workers from any who would threaten them. When Margaret and her father get home from the party, they find her mother gravely ill; now the truth can be withheld from Mr. Hale no longer. The doctor administers a strong dose of opium, and for the next few days Mrs. Hale seems to rally. When the doctor advises them to borrow a water bed to make her more comfortable, Margaret goes to the Thorntons to try to obtain one.

When she gets there, she encounters ominous noises and behavior among the poor people in the streets, all moving slowly toward the Marlborough mill and the Thornton house. Inside, she is told that Thornton has imported Irish workers, which is the cause of the anger in the neighborhood. The mob approaches the house and begins to press against the mill gates. The Irish workers hide in the upper rooms of the mill and the family waits for the soldiers who have been summoned. The mob breaks through the gates and surrounds the house. At Margaret's prompting, John goes out to speak to them, but they shout him down. Some young hotheads prepare to throw their heavy wooden clogs at him. Margaret, seeing his danger, runs out the door and stands between him and the mob, trying to get them to see reason, but to no avail. One boy picks up a stone and throws it at John, but it hits Margaret in the head, drawing blood. When the crowd sees what has happened, they slowly disperse, and John carries Margaret inside, finally admitting to himself what he has inwardly known for a long time - that he loves her as he has never loved a woman before. Mrs. Thornton makes arrangements to have her wound treated,

though the women of the house are scandalized that Margaret and John should have had their arms around one another in public. When Margaret recovers, she heads home so that she will be sure to arrive before any news of the riot reaches her parents.

While Margaret manages to keep the news of her involvement with the riot from her parents, John speaks to his mother of his admiration for the girl who had saved his life. The next morning, John comes to the Hale residence and proposes marriage to Margaret, but she coldly refuses him, stating that she would have done the same for anyone under similar circumstances. Mrs. Thornton, meanwhile, is steeling herself for what she is convinced will be Margaret's acceptance of John's offer, which would relegate her to second place in his affections. She is stunned but pleased to hear of her rejection, though she is also insulted that such a poor girl could put on such airs as to reject her noble and upright son.

While John is steadfast in his insistence on his love for Margaret, she is ambivalent about her feelings for him. In order to get her mind off the whole matter, she goes to visit Bessy. She finds everyone up in arms about the riot; Higgins is furious that Boucher, who led the mob, should do something so stupid that would surely turn public opinion against the strikers. When Margaret returns home, her mother speaks of her desire to see Frederick again before she dies. Margaret promises to write a letter to him asking him to come, though her father warns her that he would risk his life if he did so.

After Thornton makes arrangements with the police to deal with the ringleaders of the riot, he encounters Dr. Donaldson in the street and is told that Mrs. Hale continues to do poorly. He asks if he can do anything, and Donaldson tells him that fresh fruit would be beneficial. He immediately buys some and takes it to the house, being careful not to make eye contact with Margaret the whole time he is there. After he leaves, Dixon tells Margaret that Mary Higgins is downstairs, bearing the news that Bessy has died. Bessy's last request was to be buried wearing something belonging to Margaret, so she fetches a hat for the purpose. She then promises to visit the family that afternoon. When she does so, she finds Mary at a loss and Higgins, who has just found out, crushed. In his grief, he is ready to go to the tavern and get drunk, but Margaret talks him out of it and invites him home for dinner. Her father is gracious, as he is to all, and the two calmly discuss religion and the strike. Hale finds that Higgins wants to believe but can't bring himself to do it, finding much more comfort in thinking his daughter dead and gone than if he believed that her sufferings had been at the hands of God. With regard to the strike, Higgins is still angry at Boucher for ruining the union's strategy, and is now angry with Thornton for deciding not to prosecute him. Higgins admits that the union is often cruel, ostracizing those who do not belong and fining those who dare to associate with them. When Margaret suggests that some of the more sensible union leaders and masters like Thornton get together and discuss matters calmly and rationally, Higgins tells her that Thornton is the hardest of the masters, though he is less cruel than many, simply because he handles everything as a matter of business and no more. The evening ends with the three - the faithful Anglican, the Unitarian heretic, and the infidel - bowing together in prayer.

The next morning Margaret receives a letter from Edith, filled with empty-headed chitchat and encouraging her and her parents to come to Corfu for a visit. Thornton brings more fruit, and Mrs. Hale speaks of her growing admiration for the man. While Margaret is still cold toward him, she does begin to defend the use of the Milton slang as appropriate to communicate with the locals. Mrs. Thornton pays a visit that afternoon, albeit reluctantly, but when she sees how much worse Mrs. Hale has become, she agrees to look after Margaret after her mother dies, though she

promises no affection or kindness, being the sort of woman who scrupulously promises no more than she is sure she is willing to do. After she leaves, Frederick arrives. He is warmly received by Margaret, who hits it off with him immediately, and is barely in time to see his mother, since after a few days of his company, she quietly dies. Margaret's father and brother are inconsolable, so the burden of planning the funeral falls on her and Dixon, though Thornton offers to provide any help that is required. Mr. Hale suggests that they contact Mr. Bell, the best man at his wedding, who had gotten him the post in Milton originally.

The next day Dixon returns from a journey in town to report that she has encountered one George Leonards, a scoundrel who had been on Frederick's ship but had sought to curry favor with the captain. He actually had the nerve to propose that, if Dixon ever found out about Frederick's whereabouts, that she should tell him and the two of them could split the reward money. Margaret realizes that Frederick must leave immediately for his own safety, even before the funeral. She writes a letter of introduction to Henry Lennox in London, including a request that Lennox look into Frederick's case to see if he might possibly be exonerated. Frederick, meanwhile, intends to return to Spain, where he has met a young woman, Dolores Barbour, to whom he has become engaged, and for whose sake he is prepared to convert to Roman Catholicism. When Margaret takes Frederick to the train the next day, they encounter Leonards, who tries to seize Frederick and arrest him. Frederick pushes him away and he falls down an embankment, and Frederick leaps onto the train just as it is leaving the station. A few days later, Margaret gets a letter informing her that Lennox is out of town and will not be returning to London for a few days; Frederick decides to risk waiting for him. Few attend Mrs. Hale's funeral, but Thornton, unnoticed by the family, is among them, though he is deeply troubled by having seen Margaret out late the previous night on the arm of a handsome young gentleman (he knows nothing of Frederick and immediately jumps to the conclusion that she has a lover).

Thornton visits the next day to see how the family is doing. His visit is comforting to Mr. Hale, but Margaret, as usual, finds it awkward. Dixon interrupts the conversation to summon Margaret to the door, where she finds a policeman. The constable tells her that Leonards has died as a result of his fall at the train station, and that she was identified as being present the previous evening. She denies having been there, though the lie costs her dearly. After the policeman leaves, she returns to the study and promptly faints dead away. After she regains consciousness, she gets up and tells no one what has happened. Thornton leaves without seeing Margaret again, but meets the policeman in the street. He tells Thornton about the case and about Margaret's denial. Despite the fact that Thornton had seen Margaret at the train station, he uses his powers as magistrate to dismiss the case and tells the officer to pursue it no further. Margaret, struggling with both guilt and fear, gets a letter from Frederick indicating that he had safely made his escape and that Lennox was looking into his case. She then discovers that Thornton has dismissed the case and realizes that he did so on her behalf, making her feel profoundly ashamed and at the same time grateful.

The next day, Margaret and her father go to visit Mr. Higgins. They find him disconsolate because he has been unable to find work, largely because many of the mills now require their workers to swear to give no money to the Union. Margaret tries to convince him that the Union is tyrannical; he agrees, but asserts that it tyrannizes workers for their own good. He tells them that Boucher tried to regain his job by lying about his intentions and offering to tell his employer about Union activities, but was rejected. Soon a noise is heard in the street - it is a group of men carrying a dead body on a door. Boucher has drowned himself in despair. Since no one else is

willing to do so, Margaret agrees to tell the widow, a poor woman with six children under the age of eight, what has happened; she comforts her as much as she is able, though Mrs. Boucher is overcome by self-pity and is concerned only about her own griefs, even paying little attention to her children, and is willing to place blame on everyone else for her problems. The next day Higgins visits the Hales and asks them for advice about getting a job; he is considering moving south and working as a field hand. Margaret discourages him, painting a very bleak picture of the work environment in the South that contrasts greatly with her own comments about her home earlier in the book. Both Mr. Hale and Margaret then encourage Higgins to try Thornton's mill again, this time being sure to speak to the master rather than one of his foremen. He reluctantly agrees to do so.

Thornton, meanwhile, is distraught about Margaret; he can't stop thinking about her and has become terribly jealous of her supposed lover. When his mother asks him about his constant pacing, he tells her only about Margaret having been seen at the train station with a man, but says nothing about her lie and insists that someone of her character must have had a good reason for doing what she did. Mrs. Thornton, reluctant but bound to fulfill her promise to the dying Mrs. Hale, goes to Margaret and tells her in no uncertain terms that her behavior had been inappropriate, verging on scandalous. Margaret tells her she is misinterpreting what she has heard, but refuses to justify herself by telling Mrs. Thornton the truth about Frederick. Higgins, meanwhile, has been waiting to speak to Thornton about a job, as he had promised Margaret. Thornton knows him by reputation, and immediately rejects his request for employment, though he is impressed by the fact that Higgins had waited for five hours to speak to him and by his determination to care for the family of the deceased Boucher. Later in the day, Thornton has second thoughts and checks out Higgins' account of his work history and his relationship with Boucher, then visits Higgins to offer him the job, which he accepts. Margaret comes to visit Mrs. Boucher and finds her gravely ill, then encounters Thornton on her way home. Their conversation is awkward, and Margaret refuses to tell him the information that would clear her name in his mind because of her desire to protect Frederick.

Soon Mr. Bell arrives for a visit from Oxford; he is Margaret's godfather and Thornton is his tenant, so his visit is for both business and pleasure. He and Thornton engage in a long debate about the relative merits of Oxford and Milton, but Bell notices that Thornton is unusually edgy. After he leaves, Bell suggests to Hale that Thornton and Margaret appear to have tender feelings for one another. Hale denies it, but Bell wonders if he might somehow break down the obvious barriers that seem to be separating the two. In town, Mrs. Boucher has died and Higgins has taken complete charge of her children. Thornton visits often to see how the children are doing, and he and Higgins engage in lively conversation and grow in mutual respect. Captain Lennox has resigned from the army; he and Edith intend to return home and invite Margaret to visit them. Margaret, meanwhile, has given up on any hope of Frederick's name being cleared and has no desire to leave her father alone in Milton. She does suspect, however, that a visit to Oxford on his part might do him a world of good, though he insists that he intends to live out the rest of his life in Milton.

Things settle down again in Milton as Margaret occupies her time teaching the Boucher children and comforting her father. Henry Lennox holds out little hope for Frederick ever clearing his name, so he renounces all ties to England and marries his beloved Dolores, and Margaret begins to correspond with her new sister-in-law. Hale, however, seems to be getting no better, and Margaret finally persuades him to pay a visit to Adam Bell in Oxford. Hale is

warmly received by those who remember him, who seem to care little for his defection from the Church. While there, he dies quietly in his sleep one night, leaving Margaret all alone in the world. Bell decides that, since he has no children, he will care for Margaret as long as he lives and leave her his money when he dies, assuring her material comfort for the future. He goes to Milton to tell Margaret the sad news, and she falls into a state of torpor from which she is unable to emerge for weeks, even with the visit of her Aunt Shaw, who is determined to take her back to London to live with her in the home where Margaret had grown up. Before leaving, Margaret bids farewell to the Higginses and the Thorntons. Nicholas and John have had a positive influence on one another - Nicholas is much less abrasive and more thoughtful, even considering reading Mr. Hale's Bible when Margaret leaves it for him. Thornton, on the other hand, has begun to provide nutritious meals for his workers - far better than anything they would get at home. Thornton has discovered from Bell that Margaret has a brother, but Bell is unaware that Frederick came to England to visit his dying mother, so Thornton still thinks Margaret was out at night with some lover - he suspects Henry Lennox, whose name he has also heard from Bell. As a result of this, his parting from Margaret is rather strained and formal, and neither really expects to see the other again.

When Margaret goes to London, she quickly finds that she is bored out of her mind. No one seems ever to do anything of any significance, though everyone is very pleasant to her. There she sees Henry Lennox for the first time in three years, and he goes over with her in great detail the various attempts he made to advance Frederick's cause, all to no avail. Bell also pays a visit, and after seeing Margaret's distressed condition, suggests that the two of them take a trip to Helstone to see Margaret's old home and neighborhood. She readily agrees and looks forward to the trip, but when she arrives she finds it much changed. The changes are generally small, but she notices every one, not realizing that the greatest change has been in herself. The vicar who replaced her father is narrow-minded and strict, and she finds the people superstitious in the extreme. She still loves the countryside, but wonders how she could have thought the place so far superior to Milton as she had done. One afternoon, she confides to Bell the cause of her grief - the false conclusion Thornton had drawn from seeing her alone with Frederick at night at the train station, and, more importantly, the lie she had told to protect her brother. Bell laughs off the lie as the right thing to do at the time, though Margaret is not at all soothed by his attempts to comfort her, but he does promise to disabuse Thornton of his misunderstanding if the opportunity arises. As they prepare to return to London, Margaret decides that she never wants to make such a visit again.

Dixon now returns from Milton to serve as Margaret's maid in London, but she has little to report despite Margaret's burning curiosity about what is going on in the mill town. She is, of course, especially concerned to discover if Mr. Bell had been able to visit the city and keep his promise of talking to Thornton. However, he had not, though Margaret hears that he is planning to take her to Cadiz to visit Frederick and his new bride. Lennox appears at the house more and more frequently, doing little to conceal his feelings for Margaret. One day Margaret receives a letter indicating that Bell is ill. She immediately makes plans to go to Oxford to visit and care for him, but when she arrives she finds that he has already died. As expected, he left everything to her, and the amount of money involved is beyond her expectations. Margaret must now expect no trip to Spain, and also gives up on the idea of Thornton ever finding out the truth about that late night at the train station.

Meanwhile, things are going badly in Milton. An economic downturn and the aftermath of the expenses of the strike have put Thornton's mill into serious debt, and, despite willing help from his workmen, led by Higgins, he sees no way out of his predicament. He determines to give up the mill and become a manager in someone else's factory. Many of his workers communicate through Higgins that they wish to work for him should he manage someone else's mill. Higgins also tells him what Margaret didn't realize he knew - the truth about Frederick. Thornton is greatly relieved to have the shadow removed from Margaret's reputation. But Margaret, having inherited Bell's properties, is now Thornton's landlady, so he arranges to go to London to deal with financial matters. He deals first with Henry Lennox, who is Margaret's lawyer, but when Margaret finds out what is going on, she insists on dealing with him personally. She offers to use a substantial amount of her inheritance as an investment in Thornton's mill, enough to keep it going. In the course of the conversation, all barriers between them finally break down, they fall into one another's arms, and the story ends with them trying to figure out how they can possibly break the news to Aunt Shaw and Mrs. Thornton.

### NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"Mrs. Shaw had as strong wishes as most people, but she never liked to do anything from the open and acknowledged motive of her own good will and pleasure; she preferred being compelled to gratify herself by some other person's command or desire. She really did persuade herself that she was submitting to some hard external necessity; and thus she was able to moan and complain in her soft manner, all the time she was in reality doing just what she liked." (ch.1, p.15)

"I think Helstone is about as perfect a place as any in the world." (Margaret, ch.3, p.29)

"It seemed to her at the moment, as if the earth was more utterly desolate than if girt in by an iron dome, behind which there might be the ineffaceable peace and glory of the Almighty." (Margaret, ch.5, p.43)

"Mr. Thornton was in the habits of authority himself, but she seemed to assume some kind of rule over him." (ch.7, p.63)

"Altogether a man who seems made for his niche, mamma; sagacious, and strong, as becomes a great tradesman." (Margaret, ch.7, p.65)

"All laws which depend for their enforcement upon informers and fines, become inert from the odiousness of the machinery." (Thornton, ch.10, p.83)

"I do not look on self-indulgent, sensual people as worthy of my hatred; I simply look upon them with contempt for their poorness of character." (Thornton, ch.10, p.85)

"Leave a' this talk about religion alone, and set to work on what yo' see and know. That's my creed. It's simple, and not far to fetch, nor hard to work." (Higgins, ch.11, p.92)

“Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used - not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless.” (Margaret, ch.14, p.109)

“They want to be masters, and make the masters into slaves on their own ground.” (Mrs. Thornton, ch.15, p.116)

“What the master is, that will the men be, without over-much taking thought on his part.” (Thornton, ch.15, p.123)

“A man to me is a higher and completer being than a gentleman.” (Thornton, ch.20, p.163)

“He bore her into the dining room, and laid her on the sofa there; laid her down softly, and looking on her pure white face, the sense of what she was to him came upon him so keenly that he spoke it out in his pain.” (ch.22, p.179)

“And it’s th’ masters as has made us sin, if th’ Union is a sin.” (Higgins, ch.28, p.229)

“North an’ South have each gotten their own troubles.” (Higgins, ch.37, p.300)

“I believe women are at the bottom of every plague in this world.” (Thornton, ch.38, p.314)

“She was getting surfeited of the eventless ease in which no struggle or endeavour was required.” (ch.44, p.364)

“But she had learnt, in those solemn hours of thought, that she herself must one day answer for her own life, and what she had done with it; and she tried to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working.” (ch.49, p.406)

“Not good enough! Don’t mock my own deep feeling of unworthiness.” (Thornton, ch.52, p.425)

## **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. The title of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *North and South* emphasizes the contrast between the middle-class life in the south of England to which the protagonist is accustomed and the working-class life of the industrial midlands into which she is thrown. What are the major themes the author attempts to draw from this contrast? Choose three important themes related to the two settings and show how the author communicates these themes through the characteristics of the places involved.

2. Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* makes much use of contrasts of place. Not only does the author establish a counterpoint between the middle-class life of the south of England and the industrial midlands, as the title indicates, but she also uses the differences between indoor and outdoor settings to bring out her major themes. Discuss how she accomplishes this and use specific examples from the novel to support your analysis.
3. Analyze the growth of the protagonist in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. Focus especially on her changing attitudes toward the two main locations in the story, Helstone and Milton. How and why do her attitudes toward these two places change, and how do these changes help to communicate the main themes of the novel?
4. Analyze the growth of Margaret Hale in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, especially in terms of her attitudes toward social classes. How do her attitudes change as the story progresses toward the leisure class among which she was raised, the wealthy industrialists of the North, and the urban workers she gets to know for the first time?
5. Analyze the growth of John Thornton in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. How does his character change as the story progresses? Note particularly his attitudes toward classes other than the one to which he belongs.
6. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, the protagonists experience change, but many of the lesser characters exist as stereotypes to flesh out the qualities of the North and the South of the title. Choose one character from the South and one from the North and show how these characters are used by the author to communicate her opinions about the two regions and what they represent. Use specific incidents and quotations to support your answer.
7. Compare and contrast the two proposals of marriage received and rejected by the protagonist in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. In considering the offers made by Henry Lennox and John Thornton, discuss the circumstances in which the proposals are made, the language involved, and Margaret's words and feelings in rejecting the two men.
8. Compare and contrast the initial proposals of marriage by Thornton to Margaret in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Darcy to Elizabeth in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. What about the proposals almost guarantees their rejection? Be sure to analyze the language of the proposals as well as the relationships of the characters as they were at the time. How do these failed proposals provide a basis for appreciating the growth and changes that occur in the characters prior to the final accepted proposals later in the novels?
9. Compare and contrast the initial meetings of Margaret Hale and John Thornton at the Hales' dinner party in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy at the dance in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. How are their first impressions similar and how are they different? How do these initial encounters foreshadow the relationships that are to develop later?

10. At one point in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, John Thornton says, "A man to me is a higher and completer being than a gentleman." Analyze the concept of manhood presented in the novel. What are the characteristics of a real man according to the protagonists? According to the author? Support your answer with specifics from the book.
11. In chapter 37 of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, Nicholas Higgins says, "North an' South have each gotten their own troubles." Do you believe the author is balanced in her social criticism, presenting the sides of master and worker fairly? Why or why not? Be specific.
12. Near the end of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, the narrator remarks concerning Margaret Hale, "But she had learnt, in those solemn hours of thought, that she herself must one day answer for her own life, and what she had done with it; and she tried to settle that most difficult problem for women, how much was to be utterly merged in obedience to authority, and how much might be set apart for freedom in working." Discuss the view of womanhood presented in the novel. Would you describe Gaskell as a feminist? Why or why not? Support your answer with details from the novel.
13. Elizabeth Gaskell once complained that the ending of her novel *North and South* had to be compressed because of the requirements of serial publication in a magazine edited by Charles Dickens. To what extent do you consider her complaint justified? Is the ending too abrupt? Does the rapid pace at which important events occur in the last few chapters detract from the credibility of the story? Why or why not?
14. One of the frustrations of life in the Victorian Age appears to have been the difficulty of engaging in open communication. To what extent is that challenge significant in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*? How would more open communication among the main characters have avoided some of the problems that occurred in the novel?
15. Analyze the role of religion in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*. The crisis of faith experienced by Margaret's father is an early turning point in the story, but consider other ways in which religion appears as well. What is the nature of true religion according to the author? Which character is the leading mouthpiece for that religious perspective? Evaluate the author's religious perspective from Scripture. Keep in mind that Gaskell herself was both the daughter and the wife of Unitarian ministers.
16. To what extent does Richard Hale, Margaret's father, serve as a foil for John Thornton in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*? What personality traits of the two men are brought out by their contrasting characters? How do these contrasts contribute to the themes of the novel?
17. To what extent does Bessy Higgins serve as a foil for Margaret Hale in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*? Focus on the similarities between the two girls as well as the differences of their circumstances and attitudes. How do these similarities and differences help to bring out the major themes of the novel?

18. Serious literature is often leavened by the use of humor - even Shakespeare's tragedies contain some measure of comic relief. Yet critics have noted that Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* is so earnest in its approach to the social problems of the nineteenth century that it leaves no room for humor. Would you agree or disagree with this assessment? Support your conclusion with details from the novel.
19. To what extent is John Thornton in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* a representative of British capitalism? Analyze the arguments he gives for the work of the factory owner and connect those arguments to the philosophy of capitalism. Is his approach to the relationship between masters and workers a biblical one? Why or why not?
20. To what extent is the position espoused by John Thornton in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* an example of the later philosophy of Social Darwinism (note that Darwin's book was published five years after this novel)? Does he agree that the survival of the fittest in the economic world is both right and inevitable? Would you agree with this assessment? Why or why not?
21. In Philippians 2:3-4, Paul says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." To what extent are the values expressed in this passage promoted in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*? Choose three characters in the story who are marked by selflessness in their behavior and attitudes and assess whether or not they are suitable exemplars of Paul's exhortation.
22. Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* contains elements of both a Victorian romance novel and a novel of social criticism. Which, in your opinion, is more prominent? Support your conclusion with specific incidents and quotations from the story.
23. In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, the dying Bessy often finds comfort in the Book of Revelation. Analyze the tone of these passages. Does the author intend them to be taken seriously, and thus portray a genuine source of comfort for the afflicted, or are they intended to satirize the Evangelical Christianity of the Victorian era? Support your conclusion with details from the novel.
24. Evaluate the character of Margaret Hale in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* in the light of the woman described in Proverbs 31. To what extent does she fit the description given in Scripture? In what ways does she not? In conclusion, then, to what extent should she be viewed as an admirable woman from a biblical standpoint?